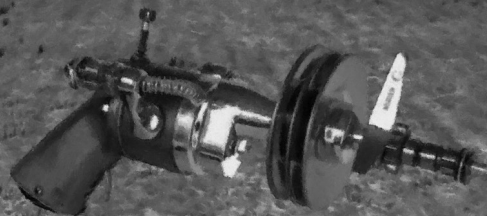
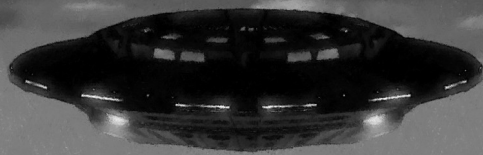


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a ray gun
in dead bone
john valdez



FROM THE NEW SERIES AMAZING STORIES FROM THE 5TH DIMENSION

A RAY GUN IN DEAD BONE

By John Valdez

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Prologue

Our story starts in 1881, deep in the harsh dry stillness of the Arizona desert where an alien scout ship lands in the brush. Beings from a distant galaxy searching for whatever it is that aliens search for begin their glorious mission on our primitive world. They camouflage their visit and observe our planet in every minuscule detail for years, recording and analyzing the people, animals and environment. As the beings finish their research, they methodically pack their instruments, and even their waste, meticulously removing all traces and any evidence they were there. They launch their ship powerfully through our atmosphere and off our world in the direction of yet another celestial body to explore. But, in their haste, a small device with a trigger is left behind which might have possibly fallen out of a pocket or carry bag that no one noticed. A ray gun lay quietly in the desert sun and its fate of course is to be found consequently. At this time in human history, it is a culture where guns rule the west, and one can only imagine what it means to a man to hold such a prize even if he isn't the fastest draw in the 5th dimension.

“Damn it, Artie—hurry yer ass up!”

“I’m comin’, I’m comin’!”

“Ah hell...thet heifer’s a trottin’ down by the sink hole. Thet ground’s jest too sof’ fer these horses. I told ya’ ta rope her.”

“I had somthin’ in ma boot, damn it.”

“Well, now we gonna have ta tie ‘er up ‘n’ drag ‘er back.”

“We got the rope.”

“That ain’t the point, Artie. Yer too damn slow.”

“Well, then let’s git it done ‘fore I git any slower.”

The two men jumped from their horses and gathered their ropes. It was a windy, dusty day and they had to get a runaway heifer back to the BIG-B, also known as the Boyle Ranch. Pretty much the only thing that was on Artie’s mind was keeping Ernest off his back as they walked carefully in the sandy canyon. That heifer was determined as hell; she was evading them all she could until she was finally up against the rock wall.

“Where’s thet sink hole. Shoulda been seen ba’ now.”

“Hell, I dunno...hey, Ernest...”

“What?”

“Go to the right...I think I got ‘er.”

“Ya’ better.”

Ernest skipped to the right as Artie ran left. A gust of wind kicked up enough dirt and dust that Artie’s hat flew off into the air, and pushed dirt into his eyes as he lost his balance. That’s when he fell into the mud hole, “Oh shit! Ernest—help me! Help me—God damn it!”

In a single motion, Ernest threw his rope, spooking the heifer which ran behind him distracting his attention from Artie just long enough for him to lose his footing and fall flat on his face.

“Damn it, Ernest—I’m sinkin’ here! Can’t ya’ hold on ta me?”

“Artie—I’m gonna kick yer ass when I git ya’ outta there...”

“I don’t care—if ya’ hang me—jest pull me out this shit hole!”

Ernest pulled himself up first, dust and all, then sped around a large boulder with the rope just enough to use as leverage when he pulled against it. He pulled and Artie came right up out of the muddy quicksand, “Oh God...thank ya’...thank ya’...I thought I was a gonner...I owe ya’ one...I owe ya’ a drink, Ernest.”

“Ya’ better say yer prayers first.”

“Why’s that?”

“Look.”

As both the young cow pokes looked on, the heifer was kicking and flailing about, sinking quickly in the mud, and before they could swing their ropes to save the young bovine, she disappeared into the sink hole.

“Well don’t thet beat all.”

“Think we’re fired?”

“Artie...” Ernest was so mad he had to stop to think what he was going to say, “you are without a doubt the dumbest son o’bitch I ever met. Of course we’re fired. We ain’t gittin’ paid neither. How d’ ya’ like that?”

“What? Wait. No pay. What d’ ya’ mean?”

“Artie, we had to bring back the heifer ta git the money. No heifer, no money.”

Artie sat on the ground rolling up his rope as if he just heard the gospel. He was counting on that money to buy his girl, Lexi, a dress. Well, he called Lexi his girl—she just didn't know it yet, "I got ta have thet money, Ernest."

"Well, I know...but..." Ernest didn't really like talking about Artie's love life. He didn't feel comfortable with his marriage intentions and knew that the dress wouldn't be enough to get Lexi's attention either. She had her eye on the deputy Marshal who happened to be the son of the biggest rancher this side of Tuscon. Ernest figured Artie would've figured it out by now—but he always was hard headed, "We just have ta tell 'em we couldn't find 'er and blame it on them Indians 'round these parts."

"Think it'll work?"

"No...but we might not git fired..."

"Shore 'nuff."

Being fired really meant whether or not they'd be allowed to stay in their shack on the far side of the ranch—they were simply extra hands when needed. Both men walked back to their horses and started packing up their ropes. Artie looked around and realized his hat was back at the sink hole, "Ahh..hell."

"What now?"

"I got ta go back 'n' git ma hat."

"Well, don't fall in thet damn hole again. It ain't worth a hat..." Ernest was yelling but Artie was already near the sink hole, "Ya' hear me?"

"Ya, ya..." Artie ran up to his hat and picked it up. A small glare shined in his eyes where he picked his hat up. He took a closer look, "Hey, Ernest!"

"What! Yer jest like a woman! What the hell do you want?"

"Git o'er here. I think I found somethin'"

"What? Yer hat? It's jest a two bit hat!"

"I think...I think, it's a gun?"

"What?"

Artie picked up a pistol, small at the handle but larger than a Dillinger without the two barrel style and no cocking mechanism. There was a cylinder but no bullets could be seen in it. He spun the cylinder and the ends of the barrel glowed.

"What the hell is this, Ernest?"

"Man, I dunno. Maybe it's one o' them there fancy toys from back east."

"Ya' think?"

"Damn it, Artie. I don't know. We're wastin' time. The boss is gonna know somethin's up."

"Bet if it's a gun, we could sell it."

Ernest stood there a second. That sounded like a good idea. Maybe the day wouldn't be a total bust after all. At the very least, maybe they could gamble it off. Old man Dennehy liked to buy toys for his niece. Maybe he'd take a bet for this one, "Well, jest pull the trigger 'n' let's see what it does. "

"Shore 'nuff," Artie took aim at a bush on the other side of the canyon. He was a terrible shot but he figured it probably wasn't going to work anyway. He pulled the trigger.

The gun vibrated and started to squeak a little. The lights went off.

"Well, there ya' go," the gun didn't fire and Ernest had a short laugh, "Ya' got yerself a toy, Artie..." Ernest chuckled on, "...now let's skidattle..."

"I dunno?" Artie moved the cylinder one click and saw a green light. He touched the light at the top of the barrel and it started to hum, "Ya'...I think it 's some kinda toy. It's a toy gun, damn it."

At that moment, Artie's horse started to act up like he always did. Ernest was trying to hold on to both horses, "Git over here, Artie. Git yer damn horse."

"I oughta shoot that horse."

"Well, ya' finally gotta gun. Might as well use it," Ernest was still chuckling as he talked to Artie.

"Ya', take that ya' ol' plug!" Artie raised the gun in a fast draw and quickly aimed. He pulled the trigger and a blaze of light shot through the horse's body and straight through to other side right into Ernest's horse as well. Both horses fell dead to the ground.

"What did you do?"

"Ernest...I..." Artie dropped the gun and ran to Ernest. They both looked at the gun and back at the horses lying dead in the sand. There wasn't even any blood, "Ernest...what...what...just happened?"

"I dunno...it's...something...though...I think it is a gun."

"What the hell kinda gun shoots lightnin', Ernest?"

"It wasn't lightnin'."

"It was lightnin'."

"Did ya' hear any thunder?"

"NO."

"Then it ain't no lightnin'—it's somethin' else and I mean whatever it is...well...it's pretty damn mean."

"I don't think we should sell it. Might cause a lot o' trouble—might get blamed fer it."

"No. Yer right 'bout that. But we can't keep it a secret either. We need ta find out what the hell it is."

"I bet it's an army gun."

"I dunno. I don't think it's a' army gun though."

"It might be!"

"NO ARTIE—This is somethin' else. I mean look at this...there aren't any seams? There ain't any screws or latches. There isn't any way ta put bullets in it."

"It doesn't use bullets, Ernest. It uses lightnin'. Ya' need clouds."

"Now that's the dumbest thing I ever heard."

"Well it don't use bullets."

"Yer right. It don't use bullets. And you jest killed our horses."

"Sorry, Ernest...I'm real sorry 'bout that."

"I'm jest glad ya' didn't point it at me."

"How we gittin' back ta town?"

"How ya' think, Artie. Grab yer gear and gimme that gun."

"Why?"

"'Cause yer too damn stupid to hold somethin' that dangerous without shootin' yer foot off."

"Well..."

"I ain't got all day."

"Aw... hell! Alright. But it's mine. I found it."

"Ya' might wish ya' hadn't."

"Why's that?"

"'Cause I think someone's gonna be lookin' fer it."

"Well, then...we might get a reward?"

"Maybe, but I'd sure hate ta find out if they weren't understandin' folk. If ya' know what I mean."

The boys paused for a moment to evaluate the situation, and then Artie started up again, “Well, let’s take it to the Marshal.”

“Ya’. I think we’d better.”

They grabbed everything they could carry and headed for town. After about two miles of walking in the hot desert sun, Artie started dragging his tack and ropes as did Ernest. They knew they were getting close as they came up to the city limits sign:

WELCOME TO DEAD BONE

Home of Rutherford B. Craig, U.S. Marshal

POPULATION: 66

“Well, we made it...there’s the town,” Ernest was just about out of breath. Neither of them had eaten in two days, because they didn’t have any money for food. The ranch didn’t feed them since they weren’t on the regular payroll but old man Boyle let them stay in a shack on the far side near town because he felt sorry for them. Everyone knew it. He used the boys to get stragglers and run errands—mostly because they didn’t know squat about ranching. Ernest was really counting on his two dollars today to get some groceries. Hopefully, they wouldn’t get kicked off the ranch.

Both boys moseyed on into the saloon and dropped everything at the bottom of the bar right at the same time. Lexi ran up to both of them, “What happened to you boys?” she called over to the bartender, “Charlie, get these boys a drink.”

“They ain’t got no money.”

“Charlie it’s on me. Can’t you see they’re in trouble.”

“It’s your money,” Charlie poured both the boys a beer and slid the mugs down the bar.

Somehow Ernest caught both of them. He passed one to Artie.

“Thank ya’, Lexi. We really ‘preciate it. We owe ya’ one.”

“Oh, no you don’t. You’ve always minded your manners ‘round me. What happened?”

“Well...” Artie started to speak and Ernest slammed his boot down on Artie’s foot.

“I’m tellin’ the lady, ‘member?” Artie backed off nursing his foot as he hopped to the next bar stool.

“We couldn’t find the heifer we were chasin’ this morn’ ‘cause when she got outta sight in the canyon—and well, we looked everywhere ‘n’ she jest disappeared. We think pro’ly Indians got ‘er.”

“So what happened.”

“Well, Artie fell into a sink hole.”

Another man entered the saloon, “That’s the biggest load o’ shit I heard in a long time.”

Ernest and Artie turned around to see the deputy walk in. Lexi ran up to him, “Oh Manny, I think the boys ran into some Indians out in the canyon.”

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